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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to compare the communication apprehension levels of Puerto Rican college students with those of United States college students. The Puerto Rican students were considered bilingual, having received instruction in English as a second language for most of their school years. In the first phase of the study, 341 students who reported Spanish as their native language completed a measure of communication apprehension. A year later, 661 students with Spanish as their native language completed the same apprehension instrument. Subjects also were asked to rate their perceived competence in English. These scores were compared to mean scores on the communication apprehension report from nearly 20,000 American students. The results indicated that the Puerto Rican students were much less apprehensive about communicating in their native language than they were about communicating in English. The findings also indicated that apprehension in a first language is a much better predictor of apprehension in a second language than is self-perceived competence in that second language. The results suggest that the problem of communication apprehension must be addressed by second language instructors if students are to be taught to be truly bilingual. (HTH)

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# DON'T SPEAK TO ME IN ENGLISH: COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION IN PUERTO RICO

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## Abstract

Comparisons of communication apprehension levels of Puerto Rican college students with U.S. mainland students indicate the Puerto Ricans are much less apprehensive about communicating in their native language than are the U.S. students but are much more apprehensive about communicating in English. Additional findings indicate that apprehension in a first language is a much better predictor of apprehension in a second language than is self-perceived competence in that second language. It is suggested that the problem of communication apprehension must be addressed by second language teachers if students are to be taught to be truly bilingual.

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DON'T SPEAK TO ME IN ENGLISH:
COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION IN PUERTO RICO

Bilingualism, the ability to communicate in two languages, is comparatively rare among the inhabitants of North America. In the Canadian Province of Quebec and in portions of the southwestern U.S. extensive efforts in the schools have been directed toward producing bilingual students. However, in no other part of North America has as much attention been paid to the study of a second language as there has been in Puerto Rico.

As a result of its centuries-old ties with Spain, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is a Spanish-speaking culture. However, with the arrival of large numbers of people from the United States in the years following the Spanish-American war and the subsequent building of economic ties with the U.S., the need for competence in English grew to rival that for Spanish in the world of commerce, if not in the everyday world of conversation. Today, virtually every Puerto Rican student studies English (as a second language) throughout their educational experience.

A monolingual English-speaking visitor to Puerto Rico quickly finds that he or she has little difficulty communicating in English with the local population. Most of the people with whom the visitor or tourist is likely to come into contact speak at least passable English, quite unlike what the visitor encounters in Asia and most of Europe. To the outsider, Puerto Ricans appear truely bilingual.

While many criteria may be employed to judge whether an individual is bilingual, most of these are beyond the scope of this paper. Our attention will be directed toward a single criterion: the degree to which an individual is comfortable when speaking the second language.

## Communication Apprehension and Communication Behavior

Communication apprehension (CA) is an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons. CA has received extensive attention from both researchers and teachers in the U.S. over the past decade and is receiving similar attention from researchers in other cultures currently. A recently compiled bibliography lists over 800 published articles and conference papers focusing on CA and related constructs (Payne & Richmond, 1984).

Our concern with the phenomonon of CA results from its close association with communication avoidance (for a summary of research and theory in this area, see Daly & McCroskey, 1984). Simply put, people who fear communication generally or are apprehensive about communicating in a given situation tend to avoid communicating. Thus, if a person is highly apprehensive about communicating generally or if they are only apprehensive about communicating in their second language, previous research clearly indicates they are likely to avoid communicating in that language.

The implications of this research for second language instruction are serious. If a student is apprehensive about communicating in their second language, it is likely they will avoid doing so and as a result fail to experience the practice so necessary to the development of true competence in the language. Of particular importance is the fact that this apprehension may stem either from the student's lack of confidence about her/his ability with the second language or from her/his general CA. While the former has been recognized as a problem by ESL teachers for years, the latter has not generally been recognized.

## Research Rationale

Prior to the present studies, no data on CA had been collected in Puerto Rico. Thus, the first objective of this research program was to generate normative data on CA for bilingual college students in that Commonwealth. College students were chosen to serve as the first Puerto Rican subjects for two reasons: 1) they represent a population which has received the maximum amount of instruction in English available in the culture, and 2) normative data for college students in the U.S. were available for comparative purposes. Our first two research questions were:

1. Are CA norms for Puerto Rican college students speaking in Spanish similar to those for U.S. students speaking in English?
2. Are CA norms for Puerto Rican college students speaking in English similar to those for U.S. students speaking in English?

The results of the preliminary study in this series (Fayer, McCroskey & Richmond, 1982) strongly suggested negative responses to both of these questions. The Puerto Rican students generated much lower norms than comparable U.S. groups relating to their communication in Spanish but much higher norms relating to their communication in English. In fact the Spanish norms obtained were among the lowest yet observed for any group while the English norms were among the highest. Because of the extremity of these results, it was deemed essential to collect additional data to determine the replicability of these findings.

Our other two research questions focused on the relationships of perceived competence in a second language and CA in a first language with CA in a second language. In short, we wanted to determine the extent self-perceived competence in a second language is predictive of apprehension in that language and the extent to which apprehension in a first language is

predictive of apprehension in a second language. These two research questions were:

3. To what extent is self-perceived competence in English predictive of CA in English?

4. To what extent is CA in Spanish predictive of CA in English?

## Method

### Samples

In the first phase of this research a total of 357 students at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, provided usable data. Of these, 341 reported Spanish to be their native language, 14 reported English, and 2 indicated another language. Only those reporting Spanish as their first language (N=341) were used for subsequent analyses.

The second phase of this research was conducted one year after the first phase. Data were obtained from a total of 683 students at various colleges and universities in Puerto Rico with the majority coming from the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras. Of these, 661 reported Spanish to be their native language, 19 reported English, and 3 indicated another language. Only those reporting Spanish as their first language (N=661) were used for subsequent analyses.

### Measurement

CA Measurement. The 24-item version of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA; McCroskey, 1982a) was employed. The subjects were asked to complete the instrument in terms of how they felt "WHEN I SPEAK IN SPANISH" and, separately, "WHEN I SPEAK IN ENGLISH." This version of the PRCA was chosen because it does not include the heavy public speaking bias in items common to the earlier versions of the instrument. In addition, this version permits generation of a total score and four subscores

representing communication in 1) groups, 2) meetings, 3) interpersonal dyads, and 4) public speaking. An additional advantage of this version of the PRCA is that norms from over 50 mainland universities and colleges are available for purposes of comparison.

To obtain an indication of the proficiency of the subjects in both Spanish and English, the subjects were asked to rate their proficiency in each language on a scale of 1-5. This measure was chosen to permit determining whether competence in a language is related to CA in that language. While it was recognized that a self-report of this type is likely to be biased in favor of a negative correlation with CA, other options were deemed even more problematic. For example, a written test of proficiency was rejected because previous research has indicated a very low relationship between CA in oral communication and CA in written communication. In addition, written proficiency has no necessary relationship with oral proficiency. Similarly, observation of oral proficiency was rejected as an option because of the difficulty in obtaining adequate observations across a variety of communication settings. In the present case, we could not even obtain teacher ratings of the students' competence, since most of the teachers had little contact with them outside of class and some did not have any exposure to the students' oral proficiency due to nature and size of class. In addition, it was believed that such observations might be heavily biased by the CA level of the student, such that confidence in oral performance may be viewed as an important part of oral proficiency.

## Results

Table 1 reports the mean scores on the PRCA and each of the subscores for the present samples for both speaking in Spanish and speaking in English. In addition, means of samples from mainland groups are included for purposes of comparison. The "Pharm" group represents data from 10,233 students enrolled in 52 schools of pharmacy throughout the U.S. The "WVU" group represents

12,418 students at West Virginia University. The "Black" group represen s 393 black students. The "Oriental" group represents 467 Oriental students. The "Hispanic" group represents 189 Hispanic students. The latter three groups are all subsets of the larger "Pharm" group.

As can be seen in Table 1, the subjects in the present study generated means among both the highest (for English speaking) and the lowest (for Spanish speaking) across the various samples. Thus, this Puerto Rican sample can be said to have the lowest level of CA or the highest level of CA of any major group sampled, depending on the language in which they are speaking. This is illustrated further in Table 2. That table reports the proportion of subjects in each sample falling into High, Moderate, and Low CA categories. These categories employ the mean on the total PRCA score from the WVU sample (the largest sample to date) as the base, with subjects scoring beyond one standard deviation above the mean as high CA and those scoring beyond one standard deviation below the mean as Low CA.

The second set of analyses considered language proficiency as a predictor of CA. Table 3 reports the correlations between proficiency and CA for both languages. As can be seen in that table, proficiency had very little relationship with CA in Spanish, but was substantially related to CA in English. The mean proficiency reported for Spanish was 3.8, while for English it was 2.8, in both samples. Thus, not only was proficiency correlated with CA, but CA was very much higher in the second language in which proficiency was reported as comparatively low. This result can serve to explain the unusually high average CA reported for these subjects when speaking in a second language (English). However, proficiency in language cannot be employed to explain CA generally, since the correlations between proficiency

and CA in the first language (Spanish) are so low as to be meaningless. It would appear, then, that low proficiency may greatly enhance CA in a second language. However, we suspect, on the basis of the Spanish results, that once proficiency reaches some moderate level, proficiency and CA are unrelated. In subsequent research this speculation will be tested directly. In support of this speculation, research by Allen, Andriate, and Cuzick (1982) has indicated that students assigned to "basic skills" classes because of deficient language skills in a mainland U.S. university report no higher CA than students assigned to regular classes. We speculate that these students find their own language proficiency at least moderately adequate (comparable to our present sample when speaking in Spanish) even though the university considers them deficient.

Table 4 reports the obtained correlations between Spanish and English for the total PRCA and for each of the subscores. As noted in that table, all of the obtained correlations were positive and in the moderate range. Thus, the predictions based on the theory of CA as a generalized trait are supported.

Multiple regression analyses were computed to determine the individual and combined predictive power of language proficiency in English and CA in Spanish in terms of CA in English. The results indicated that both variables were significant predictors of total PRCA scores in English as well as each of the subscores. As noted in Table 5, CA in Spanish was the superior predictor in all cases except the subscores for dyadic communication in the first sample. The degree of colinearity of the predictors was negligible. These results suggest that the assumption that increased proficiency will reduce apprehension about a second language is tenable. However, the results also

suggest that there probably is a critical point beyond which increased proficiency will have no additional impact on reducing such apprehension. That point is determined by the individual's CA level in her or his native language.

## Conclusions

The results generated by the data from both samples point to negative responses to our first two research questions. A far smaller proportion of the Puerto Rican students are highly apprehensive about communication in their first language (Spanish) than are U.S. mainland students. In contrast these same students are far more apprehensive about communicating in their second language (English).

While the first finding should be seen as an important result reflecting possible differences in Puerto Rican and mainland U.S. cultures, the second finding should come as a surprise to no one. Anyone who has ever studied a second language can attest to the difficulty in building one's confidence in that language, regardless of what language it is.

With regard to our third research question, it is clear that self-perceived competence in a second language is significantly related to CA in that language. While the association is not particularly large, it is much stronger than the comparable association between self-perceived competence and CA in the first language. While competence and CA are somewhat related, it is clear that they represent very different things.

The results relating to our final research question strongly suggest that the level of one's CA in her or his first language is predictive of the level of CA in her or his second language. These findings provide added support for the basic conceptualization of CA as a broad trait-like predisposition. It appears not only to cut across communication contexts, but also across languages used in those contexts.

Possible the most important conclusion we can draw from this research is that a major barrier to preparing young people to be truly bilingual has been overlooked in the past. Increasing language competence clearly is not enough. If a person is fearful of communicating, they will tend to avoid communicating. CA in a second language was found in this research to be best predicted by CA in the individual's first language. In fact, it was better than twice as good a predictor as self-perceived competence. Thus, if our schools are to prepare students who will actually function bilingually, the problem of CA in both the first and second language must be confronted directly.

With regard to the bilingual nature of the populace of Puerto Rico, the picture is clear. While Puerto Ricans may be the most bilingual people in North America, they have a long way to go. While they are not a shy or reticent people, many of even the best educated among them are apprehensively hoping that we don't talk to them in English.

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Table 1
Mean CA Scores for Puerto Rico
Samples and Comparison Groups

| Sample | Total PRCA | CA Score Group | Meeting | Dyad | Public |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Puerto Rico | | | | | |
| Spanish | | | | | |
| Sample 1 | 59.0 | 13.1 | 16.2 | 13.2 | 16.4 |
| Sample 2 | 60.7 | 13.6 | 16.5 | 13.9 | 16.7 |
| English | | | | | |
| Sample 1 | 74.7 | 17.7 | 19.6 | 18.0 | 19.5 |
| Sample 2 | 75.5 | 17.9 | 19.8 | 18.3 | 19.6 |
| Pharm | 65.2 | 15.5 | 16.4 | 14.5 | 18.7 |
| WVU | 65.6 | 15.3 | 16.3 | 14.1 | 19.9 |
| Black | 59.9 | 14.2 | 15.2 | 13.6 | 16.9 |
| Oriental | 71.2 | 17.1 | 18.1 | 16.4 | 19.6 |
| Hispanic | 67.6 | 16.4 | 17.2 | 15.1 | 18.8 |

Table 2
Percentage of Subjects at Various CA Levels

| Sample | Low CA | Moderate CA | High CA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Puerto Rico | | | |
| Spanish | | | |
| Sample 1 | 32.4 | 57.1 | 10.5 |
| Sample 2 | 27.9 | 60.3 | 11.8 |
| English | | | |
| Sample 1 | 12.5 | 44.6 | 42.9 |
| Sample 2 | 10.6 | 46.2 | 43.2 |
| Pharm | 19.9 | 60.5 | 19.6 |
| WVU | 16.0 | 68.0 | 16.0 |
| Black | 30.0 | 57.5 | 12.5 |
| Oriental | 8.8 | 60.8 | 30.4 |
| Hispanic | 15.9 | 59.3 | 24.9 |

Table 3
Correlations of Language Proficiency and CA

| | Spanish | | English | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| CA Score | Sample 1 | Sample 2 | Sample 1 | Sample 2 |
| PRCA Total | -.14* | -.16** | -.36** | -.31** |
| Group | -.13* | -.10* | -.30** | -.35** |
| Meeting | -.12* | -.16** | -.32** | -.24** |
| Dyad | -.14* | -.14** | -.38** | -.36** |
| Public | -.08 | -.13* | -.24** | -.23** |

*$p < .05$
**$p < .0001$

Table 4

Correlations Between CA in Spanish and CA in English*

| | CA Score | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | PRCA Total | Group | Meeting | Dyad | Public |
| Sample 1 | .46 | .36 | .49 | .35 | .48 |
| Sample 2 | .44 | .38 | .46 | .36 | .49 |

*All correlations are significant, $p < .0001$.

Table 5
Percentage of Variance in English CA Scores
Attributable to English Proficiency and Spanish PRCA

| | Source of Variance | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | English Proficiency | | Spanish PRCA | | Coliniarity | | Total Variance | |
| English CA Score | Sam. 1 | Sam. 2 | Sam. 1 | Sam. 2 | Sam. 1 | Sam. 2 | Sam. 1 | Sam. 2 |
| Total PRCA | 10.2* | 8.1* | 17.9* | 19.1* | 3.5 | 2.2 | 30.6* | 29.4* |
| Group | 7.4* | 7.9* | 16.3* | 15.9* | 1.7 | 2.0 | 25.4* | 25.8* |
| Meeting | 7.2* | 4.4* | 16.6* | 16.1* | 1.8 | 1.5 | 25.6* | 22.0* |
| Dyad | 12.7* | 8.6* | 10.4* | 12.2* | 2.3 | 1.8 | 25.4* | 22.6* |
| Public | 4.8* | 4.3* | 13.0* | 15.2* | 1.6 | 1.5 | 19.4* | 21.0* |

*Statistically significant, $p < .0001$.